

Luther, it may be said apologetically, could not help himself. He might have stood for the people against the princes, but in that case he would have exposed his cause to irretrievable ruin. He was under the ban of the empire, and if the elector and the landgrave had withdrawn their protection he would have become a helpless outlaw, and the Reformation would have been outlawed with him. The fate of Franz von Sickingen and the peasants shows what would have been the fate of Luther if his princely protectors had been his enemies. This is, nevertheless, a questionable conclusion. During the few years that intervened between the Diet of Worms and the Peasant Rising the Reformation had struck root in a large area of Southern and Central Germany, and, had Luther taken a less anti-popular attitude and tried to direct the social movement, it is probable that, with such a leader, the princes would have been compelled to compromise, and include social as well as religious reform in their policy. Unfortunately, Luther was not made for such a *role*. He was a mighty theological controversialist. He was not the man to rise above his own experience and become the leader of a greater cause than that of doctrinal reform—the cause of humanity. Perhaps, too, this large movement was more than any mortal could have attempted to lead with success. Certainly, a mere theologian, such as Luther essentially was, was not the man to achieve success. All that we have a right to demand of him is that he should not have clone his utmost to contribute to its failure. If he had cursed less and counselled more, he would have been both a better man and a better theologian.

In his attitude towards the peasants Luther appeared as the uncompromising apologist of constituted authority. In taking up this attitude he was not only outrageous, he was inconsistent. Was not he himself the greatest rebel of the age? Had he not risen in revolt against the oldest of all constituted authorities—the pope? Had he not defied the emperor, next to the pope the most august authority in Christendom? Had he not at Worms defied pope, emperor, council, diet? Was he not under the imperial ban? True, the sentence against him was not passed in due form. The ban was the result of a catch vote, of mean tactics on the part